

law to an additional 13 million people who work for firms with between 25 and 50 employees. Their families face the same crises. Their children deserve the same attention. I concur wholeheartedly with Senator DODD, the original architect of the Family and Medical Leave Act, who has proposed this expansion.

There is another very important leave issue for working families—the need for a brief break in the workday to meet the more routine, but still very important, demands of raising children. Every working parent has experienced the strain of being torn between the demands of their job and the needs of their children. Taking a child to the pediatrician, dealing with a child care crisis or meeting with a teacher to discuss a problem at school, accompanying a child to a preschool or school event—all of these often require time off from work. No parent should have to choose between alienating the boss and neglecting the child.

Many employers understand this, and allow their workers to take time for family responsibilities. But many other companies refuse to accommodate their workers in this way.

The ability of parents to meet these family obligations should not be dependent on the whim of their employer. In a society that genuinely values families, it should be a matter of right.

Under legislation already proposed by Senator MURRAY, working parents would be entitled to 24 hours of leave a year to participate in their child's school activities. I would add time for a parent to take a child to the doctor. Employers would have to receive at least 7 days advance notice of each absence, so that employers will have ample opportunity to arrange work schedules around the brief absence of the employee.

Clearly, this legislation is needed. A recent survey of 30,000 PTA leaders found that 89 percent of parents cannot be as involved in their children's education as they would like because of job demands.

A Radcliffe Public Policy Institute study completed last year found that the total time that parents spend with their children has dropped by a third in the past 30 years. This disturbing trend must be reversed.

Greater involvement of parents in their children's education can make a vital difference in their learning experience. A big part of that involvement is more regular contact between parent and teacher, and more regular participation by parents in their children's school activities. Many of those meetings and activities are scheduled during the work day. As a result, millions of parents are unable to participate because their employers refuse to allow time off. Permitting a modest adjustment in a parent's work day can greatly enrich a child's school day. All children will benefit from this kind of parental support and encouragement, and so will the country.

QUALITY CHILD CARE

Child care for infants and young children is essential for the majority of mothers who work outside the home. However, quality child care for these youngsters is often hard to find. A 1995 GAO study found a shortage of infant care in both inner city and rural areas.

Even where facilities are available, they often do not provide the type of care which would be an enriching experience for young children. A majority of children in child care spend 30 hours or more per week. Their well being requires more than merely a safe and clean place to stay while their parents are at work—though even this is currently out of reach for far too many families. Young children—even infants and toddlers—need regular interaction with attentive caregivers to stimulate their curiosity and expand their minds.

This requires a much lower staff to child ratio than most providers can afford and it requires a level of training, supervision, and compensation which is seldom present. The early years are too precious—their potential too great—for children to spend them in custodial rather than educational care. Yet according to the Work And Family Institute, only one in seven child care centers offers quality care and only 9 percent of family child care homes are found to be of high quality.

To say this is not to criticize those currently providing care. Most work hard to create the best atmosphere for children they can given the current level of resources. However, a simple comparison with the kind of support required under the Military Child Care Act demonstrates how much better we could be doing with the civilian child care system.

Under the military statute, each child care provider participates in an individualized training program and receives salary increases based on their training. Each child care center is monitored at least four times a year and has an on-site teacher mentor. In addition, the military has established family child care networks designed to serve infants and toddlers where similar supports are provided. As a result of these provisions, provider salaries have dramatically increased when compared to civilian child care and staff turnover is negligible. Staff to child ratios have been reduced and individualized care and attention increased. The quality of the services provided reflects these changes. The children of working families deserve no less.

I am proposing that we provide incentive grants to States to model their child programs after the high quality services offered by the military.

This would include lower ratios as well as better training, supervision, salaries, and support. In this way, those who regularly care for our youngest children would be able to provide them with the nurturing and individualized attention they need and deserve. The time spent by children in child care would then become a valuable learning experience for them.

HEAD START

Head Start is widely recognized for its success in providing children from low income families with a solid developmental foundation. It focuses on the complete child—education, emotional growth, physical, and mental health, and nutrition. It strongly encourages parental involvement. Most importantly, it allows at-risk youngsters to enter school ready to learn. Head Start works extremely well for those it serves.

However, even with recent funding increases, it serves only 40 percent of eligible children. There are few legislative initiatives which make more sense than fully funding Head Start. It could truly change the lives of many of those children currently excluded.

In 1994, we established a new Early Head Start initiative for infants and toddlers. HHS has awarded 142 grants nationwide for programs to provide basic early education, nutritional and health services for children under 3 years of age from low income families. This pilot program has proven very successful. The scientific research I alluded to earlier makes a compelling case for services directed to children in their earliest years. If we are seriously concerned about helping children expand their learning capacity, the Senate should fund a major expansion of Early Start.

DISABLED CHILDREN

As we make these reforms for the benefit of all children, we must not forget to provide for the special needs of disabled children. Despite their disabilities, these children hold great potential. With adequate support and assistance from us that potential can be realized. We cannot in good conscience leave the families of these children to face such enormous challenges alone.

CONCLUSION

The national agenda for young children which I have outlined today will give children—regardless of their family's income—a fair chance to reach their full potential. What occurs during a child's earliest years will make a lifetime of difference.

We know how important preventive health care, parental involvement, quality child care, and early learning opportunity during those years are to that child's later development. How can we fail to act? These issues are compelling and they deserve a strong bipartisan response. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make this agenda for young children a high priority for Congress in 1997.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, if the Chair would alert me when I have 1 minute remaining, I would appreciate that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THOMAS). The Senator has 10 minutes.

NORTH DAKOTA—THE IMPACT OF BLIZZARD HANNAH ON UTILITIES AND ELECTRIC CUSTOMERS

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I rise to give my third report on the disaster

that is still developing in North Dakota after the most severe winter storm in 50 years on top of the most heavy snowfall of any winter in our history on top of the worst flooding in 150 years. Last night, late yesterday, we had a serious situation develop because the main dike protecting Fargo, ND, which is the largest city in my State, sprang a leak. I talked last night to both the mayor and the head of the Corps of Engineers for our area, Colonel Wonzik. They told me they intended to build a second dike inside of the main dike to contain any burst that might occur.

I am pleased to report this morning that that effort is well underway and that the leaking has been contained at this point. But all of us understand that this is an extraordinary situation. These dikes are expected to stand up for much longer than would usually be the case because the flood conditions are so unusual. We have now been told that the crest may last for as long as a week, and that puts enormous pressure, not only on the dikes that were constructed by the Corps of Engineers, but on the dikes that were constructed by literally hundreds of individual homeowners who, in some cases, built walls of sandbags 15 feet high to protect their homes and neighborhoods.

I brought with me today some photographs that show the extent of the damage that has been done by this extraordinary storm. This first chart shows power lines. I do not know if people are able to see it, but it shows about 3 inches of ice that line the power line. Of course, what has happened is first we had a massive ice storm and then 70-mile-an-hour winds. The result was the power poles came down. They snapped like they were toothpicks. It is really extraordinary.

I drove into one town, and coming from the north side there was power pole after power pole just snapped off. This is a condition that led to over 80,000 people being without power. Thankfully, most of those people's power is now restored, although power for some still is not, and this is from a week ago Saturday. Can you imagine being without power for that extended period of time when conditions outside were, at their worst, 40 below wind chill and no heat? We have reports of one fellow who started burning fence posts in his house to keep warm. Others who were using propane heaters, putting them in one room and the family gathering around the propane heater in order to keep warm.

This picture shows a string of power poles, all knocked down by these extraordinary conditions. Let me just say, if I can, that there has been an extraordinary response. We want to say thank you to the power companies that supply North Dakota for flying in extra crews from around the country to help out. I want to take this moment to especially thank our neighbors to the north, because the Governor informed me last Monday that we were faced

with a situation in which Manitoba Hydro wanted to send in crews to help us restore power lines, but they were being held up at the border by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. We called them and they immediately gave us a 2-week waiver on all of their requirements at the border, and Manitoba Hydro sent in over 100 people, crews, to help rebuild power lines in North Dakota—I think just an extraordinary act of neighborliness by our neighbors to the north in Canada. We deeply appreciate their action.

This shows the conditions and the power of this storm. You see this picture shows this power pole just snapped, again, like a toothpick. It is absolutely shattered by the force of these ice storms followed by extraordinarily high winds.

This photo shows the difficult conditions that the workers had to contend with in trying to rebuild these lines. Again, 80,000 people without power, most of them for 4 or 5 days. Here they are, working in these very difficult conditions, trying to rebuild lines.

This photo shows, on a farmstead, the kind of heavy equipment that was needed just to get an opening to get through to where the power poles were down. We had in parts of our State 24 inches of snow in this last storm. The people at the University of North Dakota tell me this was the most powerful winter storm in 50 years, and in North Dakota we have had some powerful winter storms. This year alone we have had eight blizzards and six winter storms that put over 100 inches of snow on the ground before this storm. And this storm, of course, was extraordinary by anyone's measure.

This picture shows, again, the extraordinarily difficult conditions the workmen were facing trying to rebuild lines. Jobs that would normally take 2 or 3 hours were taking 10 to 12 hours in order to rebuild these facilities and get power back to people so they could have heat.

Can you imagine being without power? We have all gotten so used to having electricity that I think we sometimes forget how important and central it is to our lives. Just heat alone in our part of the country is absolutely critical. Can you imagine being without any heat in your home for a week when it is extremely cold outside? And not having electricity for any of the conveniences of modern life? This is what these people have been contending with.

I must say, we have seen really heroic actions. I remember being in one town and the mayor described how one of the underground tunnels that carried water was blocked. They called in the fire department that had a man who was a diver. They asked him—remember, this is 40-below wind chill—they asked him to dive down in 6 or 7 feet of water to open up that valve so the water could flow. That takes courage. That young fellow did not hesitate. He went down and unblocked that

line that otherwise would have led to far greater flooding. These kinds of heroic efforts have been repeated over and over.

We have had Coast Guard crews in North Dakota. Some people must be wondering, Coast Guard in North Dakota? North Dakota is landlocked. Why would we be having Coast Guard crews in a State like North Dakota?

Very simply, those Coast Guard crews have background and experience and training in water rescue. They can tell some harrowing tales of going out and rescuing people who were in automobiles or were in homes that were surrounded by water. One of the things members of these rescue crews said to me is: Senator, we have never worked in a situation in which we were blocked by ice. We are used to dealing with water, but we are not used to dealing with ice on top of the water and having to break through ice in order to get through to people to save them.

Obviously, not all of the stories have had happy endings. We had a terrible tragedy of a young woman and her 3-year-old daughter who were in a car that went off the road. Water filled it. They were able to escape somehow and then tried to walk to a home that they knew about that was out in the country, a farmstead. Unfortunately, the rivers in this part of the State wind in a very unpredictable way and what they encountered, as they were walking in the bitterly cold weather, soaking wet, was, once again, the river. That young woman and her child died in a field south of Fargo, ND.

There are many other stories, tragic stories, and stories of extraordinary heroism, where people were able to make a difference in saving lives and saving property.

I will just conclude by saying I hope we move the disaster supplemental bill with dispatch. I hope we move that legislation in a way that will provide sufficient funding to be able to manage this latest crisis.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida is recognized for up to 30 minutes.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the privilege of the floor be extended to Jason Zotalis, an intern in my office, for the remainder of today's morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRAHAM. I thank the Chair.

(The remarks of Mr. GRAHAM pertaining to the introduction of legislation are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. HOLLINGS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

(The remarks of Mr. HOLLINGS pertaining to the introduction of S. 592 are located in today's RECORD under